



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

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MMDR Task Force supports amendments to the Navajo criminal code to protect victims of violence and abuse



MMDR Task Force Chairwoman Amber Kanazbah Crotty and Council Delegate Helena Nez Begay.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — On June 12, the Missing and Murdered Diné Relatives (MMDR) Task Force met the Navajo Nation Office of the Prosecutor's Major Crimes Unit to review critical proposed amendments to the Navajo Nation Criminal Code, Title 17.

The meeting was led by Kevin Barnett, Esq., an attorney with the Major Crimes Unit, focused on strengthening legal protections for Diné children, families, and survivors of serious crimes.

Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty, Chair of the MMDR Task Force, emphasized the urgent need for reform. "Our families and survivors are advocating for these changes. Their voices and lived experiences are shaping legal reforms that protect our children, elders, and families," said Chairwoman Crotty. "Mr. Barnett's work to modernize Title 17 is a direct response to what our people have been demanding—accountability, justice, and safety."

The presentation highlighted a decades-overdue effort to modernize the Nation's criminal statutes. Barnett stressed that current legal language lacks clarity, consistency, and victim-centered protections. He explained that the proposed amendments would eliminate the statute of limitations for serious crimes such as child sexual assault, rename outdated terms like "seduction," and establish mandatory jail time for child-related offenses.

Barnett proposed a set of reforms to close gaps in the legal system like those that allow serious offenders to avoid prosecution or sentencing.

The proposed amendments introduce 16 new offenses to the Navajo Nation's criminal code, focusing on protecting vulnerable populations and modernizing legal protections. These offenses collectively aim to close legal loopholes, increase accountability, and provide more robust protections for Diné children, families, and community members against various forms of violence and abuse.

Barnett explained that these additions are necessary to align Navajo law with state and federal statutes, allowing prosecutors to bring appropriate charges and ensuring that offenders face real consequences.

Council Delegate Helena Nez Begay reaffirmed the Task Force's commitment to supporting families and survivors. "Working collaboratively with the Prosecutor's Office and our communities ensures we create laws that reflect justice. Our people's safety is our top priority, and these amendments are a step forward."

The MMDR Task Force will review the amendments for further deliberation.

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